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Self-advocacy for People with Learning Disabilities

A Guide for Adult Educators

Shelley Hourston
March 2011

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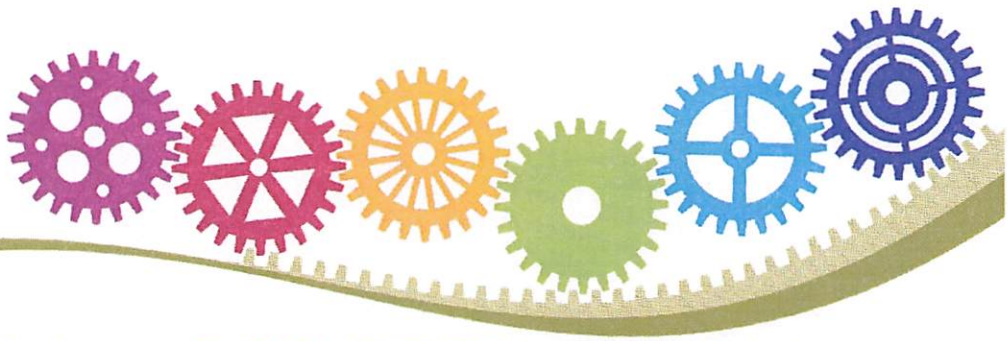

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371.90475 H68 2011

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A publication of the Whole Life Approach to Learning Disabilities in Adult Literacy Settings project, based at Literacy BC in partnership with the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities

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Canada

This project was made possible with funding support from the Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.
Ce projet a été rendu possible grâce à l'appui financier du Bureau de l'alphabétisation et des compétences essentielles du gouvernement du Canada.

Acknowledgements

Portions of this guide have been adapted with permission from publications of several advocates and advocacy organizations. Thank you for generously sharing your experience and knowledge:

Mary Ellen Copeland
Center for Mental Health Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA)
Mary L. Hines
Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service
Disability Rights Wisconsin
The US National Mental Health Consumers' Self-help Clearinghouse
The American Psychological Association
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. OLES

I'm grateful for the support, wisdom and humour so graciously shared by the Learning Disabilities and Whole Life Learning team: Betsy Alkenbrack, Patty Bossort, Tina Chau, Emily Hunter, Melinda Johnston, Doreen MacLean, Marina Niks, Suzanne Smythe and Kate Trethewey.

Thank you to Mary Doug Wright for editing and proofreading assistance.

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EVERYDAY ADVOCACY*

It's important to recognize advocacy as something we do in everyday life, beginning when we're toddlers. As an adult, speaking up for yourself will sometimes will be needed on a more personal and subtle level. Maybe you have a friend who talks too much. Maybe your child is having trouble at school and you think the teacher is blaming her. Maybe you received a bill for more than what you were told you'd be billed. Maybe your doctor, or some other health care provider, has made disparaging remarks, such as "Do you really think you need this appointment?" Maybe your partner always talks you out of doing something that you want to do by saying something, like "You're no good at that, I'll do it." Maybe your neighbour is accusing you of a problem you are not responsible for. Maybe your landlord hasn't fixed something he said he would.

Everyone has these kinds of problems. Having to advocate for yourself is a fact of life. Consider the following list of actions you can take to speak up for yourself:

- Take a class in conflict resolution or assertiveness. Learn how to calmly, firmly, and effectively speak for yourself.
- Join a self-help, or peer support group, because there is power in collective action.
- Call a mediator—someone who can act as a referee during your discussion.
- Consult a lawyer or advocacy agency.
- Tell your friends, family, and neighbours what is going on and ask for ideas.
- Take a friend with you when you must stand up to an aggressive person.
- Consider how you would want to see someone else handle the situation, and then follow your own advice.

*Adapted with permission from: Mary Ellen Copeland. *Speaking Out for Yourself: A Self-help Guide*. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA), 2002. Available: http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA-3719/SMA-3719.pdf

THE PRICE OF BEING PASSIVE*

A passive response—failing to assert personal wants and needs—is ineffective because people are rarely able to get what they want without asserting their opinions. However, there are many reasons why we might have a passive response to a challenge, including:

- lack of preparation, leading to lower confidence/effectiveness
- lack of knowledge of legal rights
- fear of disapproval, scolding, or punishment
- lack of confidence in our own opinions as opposed to those of professionals
- general feelings of despair or powerlessness

The power of knowledge

Developing a plan and gaining as much knowledge as possible about your topic will pay off more than you might think. Planning your advocacy strategy in advance gives you a bird's eye view of potential paths and roadblocks. By evaluating various options you can be better prepared. Becoming knowledgeable about your challenge or area of advocacy will help you understand why a service provider may be responding in a particular way or be unwilling or unable to help. In addition, showing that you are well informed will communicate that you are committed to your goal and encourage service providers to meet you half-way.

Building a reference library of information about your learning disabilities and any other disabilities or health conditions you have will save time in future. Be sure that the information you gather is from a reliable source, is brief (people won't read a lot of information) and is easily understood by a readers from a range of backgrounds. Begin with organizations for learning disabilities and others related to your disability or health condition. Visit your public library and talk about your information needs with the reference librarian. There are many resources and levels of information besides the online catalogue and so it's very important to describe your research to the librarian.

*Adapted with permission from *Freedom Self-advocacy Curriculum First Workshop: Teachers' Guide*. Philadelphia, PA: National Mental Health Consumers' Self-help Clearinghouse, [N.d.]. Available: http://tinyurl.com/486j5ph

As you build your case, you also must look at the other side of the argument. Why is the other side acting the way that it is acting? Is there a rule or policy that they are following? Being able to acknowledge the other side's viewpoint as you advocate for yourself shows that you appreciate the other side's needs. This will help you build and maintain relationships.

C. Decide on an Action Plan

Now that you know what you want and you have information about it, what do you think is your best strategy for getting what you want or for achieving your goal? What steps would you need to take? You may want to set a timeline and even small goals to achieve by certain dates. You may want to think of several ways to address the problem in case one way doesn't work out.

Gather support

You don't need to plan your strategy alone. It is easier and usually more effective to work on getting what you want and need for yourself if you have the support of one or several friends, family members, or health care providers. You may even want to start or join a group of people with issues similar to yours, such as a self-help or peer support group. If necessary, call an advocacy organization for advice.

A good supporter is someone you like, respect, and trust, and who likes, respects, and trusts you. A good supporter:

- allows you the space to change, grow, make decisions, and even mistakes
- listens to you and shares with you, both the good and the bad times
- respects your need for confidentiality
- lets you freely express your feelings and emotions without judging, teasing, or criticizing
- gives you good advice when you want and ask for it, assists you in taking action that will help you feel better, and works with you to figure out what to do next in difficult situations
- accepts help from you when they need it
- is someone you want to be with, but don't desperately need to be with
- doesn't ever take advantage of you

Keep in mind that even the very best friend may inadvertently let you down from time to time. No one is perfect. Try to forget the incident and continue with the good relationship you have.

Target your efforts

Who do you need to deal with to get action on this matter? Talk directly with the person or people who can best assist you. It may take a few phone calls to discover which organization, agency, or person can help, and to find out who is in charge, but it is worth the effort. Finding the right person early will save much frustration and time. Consider the best way to reach the person. You may be able to ask someone who works with them or knows them personally about their preferred way of responding to questions or requests. Depending on your situation, there may be clear guidelines listed on a website or elsewhere about how to move forward with your request. As always, it's helpful to discuss options with your support contacts.

Plan what you will say in advance

Plan the words and phrases you'll use before you talk to someone. You may be repeating your story or situation many times and it's helpful to have written a compelling, brief and accurate record at the beginning of your advocacy work.

"Create a filing system, containing the records you may need (e.g. medical, educational records) for easy access and reference. Prepare a checklist of thoughts, questions and concerns regarding the issue or problem you are advocating for. You can also use a computer, camera or audio recorder to keep your records."
Advocacy Tool Kit. Toronto: Muscular Dystrophy Canada, [2010?].
Available: http://tinyurl.com/4l6ef2m. p. 5

D. Record-keeping*

Keeping records of all your self-advocacy activities is extremely important.

Write a "master copy" of your story

Self-advocacy often requires that you tell your story or situation over and over again. Because we are so familiar with the situation or event, we often gloss over details when communicating for self-advocacy purposes. Writing your story is an excellent way to become clear about details and the order of events. Having a written version will allow you to communicate details consistently and will save time and effort. You may find it helpful to "tell" your story to a friend or colleague and either write it as you go or record it to write down later.

Filing system

You'll need to set up a filing system or create a binder in which to keep your paper work. This is an essential step in successful self-advocacy. A 3-ring binder with dividers and plastic sleeves or pocket folders to hold odd-sized papers can be arranged by subject, date or type of document. Whether you use a binder or a filing box, it must be user-friendly and convenient for you to organize and search.

Creating a paper trail

Creating a paper trail means having in writing events and decisions which are important to your advocacy effort. Experience has shown that having a written record of what went on and when is crucial to building an agreement and substantiating your position. Paper trail skills include documentation and note taking.

Good documentation includes keeping notes of all conversations (phone and in-person) beginning with the initial contact. The information you should record in a log or contact sheet includes the following:

- Date
- Time
- Full name of the person(s) you contacted
- Person's title
- Agency name
- Agency telephone number, and
- A description of what was discussed

*Portions of this section have been adapted with permission from *Advocacy Tool Kit: Skills and Strategies for Effective Self and Peer Advocacy* (Rev. ed.). Milwaukee, WI: Disability Rights Wisconsin, 2008. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4rd92vu

If there is a question about the accuracy of conversation, follow up with a letter to the individual summarizing your understanding of the conversation. Keep copies of all letters, email, faxes and other information that you send out. Of equal importance, keep all letters and copies of information you receive from agencies and individuals.

Taking Notes

Note taking provides a written record of what happened at a meeting or during a phone conversation. Note taking also shows others that you are an active participant in what is occurring. When you are taking notes, people around you are more likely to feel accountable.

If you have difficulty taking notes while participating in a meeting, bring someone with you to write notes for you. Take notes at every advocacy meeting and conference you attend to ensure that you have a record of all the information you receive. Also, keep a notebook by the phone so that you can keep a record of everyone you talk to and anything said that should be documented. You may wish to use the "Phone Conversation Log" on page 26.

It is helpful to keep the following in mind when taking notes:

1. At the beginning of your notes, list the name and role of those spoken to, and list the day, place and time of the conversation. State the primary purpose of the call or meeting in one or two sentences.
2. Use an outline format and modify it to meet the needs of individual calls or meetings.
3. Write key words and abbreviations rather than long sentences. The fewer words written, the more time is available for thinking and actively participating.
4. Leave space along the left-hand margin for filling in answers to questions and for clarifying points which are not initially understood. Ask the speaker to clarify what she is saying if you don't understand.
5. Use a colored felt tip pen to underline important terms and phrases. This is very helpful when you go back later to review your notes.
6. Before you end the communication, if possible, review your notes, be sure they are dated, and ask for any clarifications that are needed. If you type your rough notes, be sure to save the originals in case of later misinterpretation.
7. Keep your notes in a file or 3-ring binder

E. Written Communication*

Being able to write a short, direct, and assertive letter will aid your advocacy efforts. Writing letters is a skill, but fortunately it is easier to learn than almost any other style of writing. As a general rule, the shorter your letter, the better. Keep in mind that a copy of every letter you write should be added to your files. Keeping records of your letters is easier than keeping detailed records of phone conversations, but equally important.

Writing an advocacy letter

Although the standard business letter is typed, it is acceptable to hand-write a letter if you don't have access to a computer. Try to write as neatly as possible, and always be sure to keep a copy for your file.

Whether typed or hand-written, keep your letter short, simple, and clear. One page is best. Long letters may not get read. Make sure it is easy to read. In the first paragraph, tell them exactly what you want. Then add details or more information in the rest of the letter.

An advocacy letter clearly describes a concern or problem and requests a response from an individual or organization. An effective letter will include the following elements:

1. Date. An advocacy letter should be written as soon as possible after the event or incident of concern. Your letter formally registers your concern. The date (including the day, month and year) will appear below your name and address at the top of the page.

2. Inside address. The name, title, organization and address (and fax number if you are faxing the letter) is sometimes called the "inside address" and follows the date. Including an individual's name will make the letter stronger than simply addressing an organization.

3. Salutation. Your salutation should formally address the person you are contacting, for example: "Dear Dr. Learned" or "Dear Ms Knowbody." Note that "Mr." and "Mrs." are followed by a period as they are abbreviations. "Ms" does not include a period.

*Portions of this section have been adapted with permission from:
Freedom Self-advocacy Curriculum: Third Workshop. Teachers' Guide. Philadelphia, PA: National Mental Health Consumers' Self-help Clearinghouse, [N.d.]. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4qfjped
and
Advocacy Tool Kit: Skills and Strategies for Effective Self and Peer Advocacy. (Rev. ed.) Milwaukee, WI: Disability Rights Wisconsin, 2008. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4rd92vu

4. Body of the letter. Explain why the incident was a problem that needs to be addressed, mentioning laws or regulations if appropriate. If possible, describe actions you feel would be appropriate in resolving the issue.

5. In the first paragraph (two or three sentences), you should introduce yourself and explain briefly why you are writing.

6. In the following paragraph(s), explain the problem, including where and when it happened, how it affected you and anything you may have already done in response (such as contacting other people or organizations).

7. Closing. Very briefly recap the problem and your wishes or expectations. Close with "Sincerely," or "Regards," before signing your name.

8. Copies to others you want to know about the incident and letter. Following your signature, include, for instance, "cc: Alison Smith, Director of Housing Services, Anytown, BC" to indicate the person receiving a copy of the letter.

9. Proofread and check for accuracy and tone. Ask someone else to read it. Confirm the address, make a copy for your records (extremely important), and mail (or fax) the letter.

Other considerations

As you gain experience as a self-advocate, you will feel more comfortable writing letters, and learn what works and what doesn't. Here are some other things to think about when writing letters as part of your advocacy effort:.

- Tone: When writing your letter, pay special attention to your tone. Although you may feel angry, avoid a rude or insulting tone. Simply state the facts and your request.

- Sending by registered mail or by courier: For a few extra dollars, you can send a registered letter (which will require a signature when received) or use *Priority* or *Xpresspost*™ service. Not only will this make your letter stand out to the recipient, you'll know exactly when the letter arrived.

- Ask friends for help in writing letters and to check for errors in spelling or grammar. They can also give you important feedback on the tone of the letter.

- Always keep a copy of your letter for your records.

Examples of advocacy letters can be found in:
Glen W. White, Richard Thomson, & Dorothy E. Nary. *The Action Letter Portfolio: Writing Advocacy Letters That Work! Lawrence*, KS: Research & Training Center on Independent Living at the University of Kansas, 1998. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4el6ez7

Writing an advocacy email

Email is a common and convenient means of advocacy communication. An email can be sent within minutes to follow up on a telephone conversation or to register a complaint. It is often easier to access email addresses for individuals at various levels of an organization than direct telephone numbers. Such ease of access, however, can too often lead people to sabotage their own advocacy plan. The very features which make email a perfect advocacy tool also pose potential problems.

Like the advocacy letter or fax, an advocacy email will include the following elements:

1. Date: automatically inserted by your email software

2. Recipient's email address: the address you were given or have found through research.

   Note: You may have recorded an email address during a phone conversation or copied it from another document—is the email address correct? Have you keyed it into the address field accurately?

   Caution: If you are writing this email while feeling angry, you may be inclined to add one or more additional email addresses while you're at it. Perhaps you would like to add email addresses for people in increasingly higher positions of authority—just to get your point across. When feeling angry, it is easy to forget that an email address is ultimately going to be read by a human being with the power to help you or not. Be certain you are emailing the appropriate person and not alienating them by your tone.

3. Copies to others you want to know about the incident. In a letter, your "cc" follows your signature but in an email it appears immediately following the recipient's address.

   Caution: Are you certain that you want to send a copy of the email to this person? What are your reasons for copying this individual? Is there someone else who should be copied as well or instead of this person? Your choice of whether to "cc" someone else may affect the primary recipient's willingness to help you.

"Be sure your name is reflected properly in the From field. Jane A. Doe (not jane, jane doe or JANE DOE)."
Judith Kallos. "101 Email Etiquette Tips." Senatobia, MS: NetManners.com, 2011. Available: http://www.101emailetiquettetips.com

4. Subject line: Although it is customary to provide a subject line in a business letter (and even more so in a fax), a subject line is extremely important in an advocacy email. Your subject line must provide information about the content of the email without causing the recipient to dismiss and possibly delete your message before opening it.

   There are no clear cut rules for subject lines. Generally, subject lines should provide a brief reference to a topic which falls within the recipient's job responsibilities. At this stage, you're aiming for a calm, non-confrontational introductory phrase that does not discourage the recipient from opening the email. It should *not* be emotional or angry.

   Caution: Very long subject lines or those containing one or more "stop words" will result in your email being sent automatically to the recipient's "junk folder" or "spam folder." This means your email will be delayed and quite possibly deleted.

   "Stop words" are words that appear in spam or junk mail. They are stopped by spam software which redirects them away from the user's inbox. Examples of stop words include: free, opportunity, credit, discount, loan, price, promo, approved, bonus, wealth and inexpensive. You can find more examples by searching the Internet for "subject line stop words." Being aware of the types of words filtered out by spam catchers will help you create a better subject line.

5. Salutation: You should begin your message with an appropriate "Dear Ms Knowbody" or "Dear Mr. Somebody."

6. In the first paragraph (two or three sentences), you should introduce yourself and explain briefly why you are writing. If you have an account, invoice or identification number that will help the recipient identify you, add it at the beginning of your message (for instance, "Account number 234-6789").

7. Explain the problem, including where and when it happened, how it affected you and anything you may have already done in response (such as contacting other people or organizations).

8. Explain why the incident was a problem that needs to be addressed, mentioning laws or regulations if appropriate. If possible, describe actions you feel would be appropriate in resolving the issue.

   Caution: It is very easy to let an email ramble on to a great length. It is important to be clear but concise.

9. Closing. Very briefly recap the problem and your wishes or expectations. Close with "Sincerely," or "Regards," before typing your full name.

   Caution: Include your telephone number and mailing address after your name to provide the recipient alternate ways to contact you.

10. If your email software has the option, you may wish to send your message with "Confirm receipt" or "Confirm delivery" activated. If you set "Confirm receipt," when the recipient opens your email, a message window will appear saying "The sender of this email wishes acknowledgement of receipt. Respond?" They can then click "yes," which sends you an email with the date and time that they opened your message. If they click "no," you will not receive confirmation. Some people find "Confirm receipt" irritating and will click "no" as a matter of principle.

    Another option which is invisible to the recipient is to set "Confirm delivery." You will receive an automated message confirming that your message has been delivered to the email address.

11. Proofread and check for accuracy and tone. Ask someone else to read it. Confirm the address, print a copy for your records and when you're satisfied that it is complete, send your email.

Other considerations:
While email is a convenient and inexpensive, it's important to remember that your message can easily be forwarded to anyone without your knowledge or consent. Portions of your message may be shared with others out of context. Unlike telephone or face-to-face communication, it is impossible to know whether your message has been interpreted in the way you intended. In addition, your email may live on months or years after you have revised or updated your message. Once you click "send," you can never be certain of where your information will end up.

Finally, as discussed in the advocacy letter section, always: be aware of your tone, do proofread carefully and ask a friend or family member to review your message before you send it.

F. Verbal Communication*

Advocacy on the Telephone

We all know how to use the telephone, but we can learn to use it more effectively as a tool for getting what we want. Many people, understandably, lose patience when dealing with large bureaucracies such as insurance companies or government agencies. More and more, callers must navigate automated menus before reaching a live person. Some people have feelings of fear or anxiety when making phone calls. There are things we can do to improve our telephone communication skills.

Phone manners/managing anger

Resolving a problem by phone is often the quickest and most straightforward way to resolve a problem. However, the process still takes some time and causes some frustration. If you are able to control your anger at the delays and frustrations that you experience, then you'll be a much more effective advocate for yourself.

Using the telephone for self-advocacy is fairly common when dealing with educational institutions, healthcare organizations, insurance companies and government agencies. Your first point of contact will often be a pre-recorded phone menu that asks you to press keys to be connected to the right department. When you finally do reach a live voice, it is often a front-line employee who might not have the authority to respond to your request.

Your inclination might be to scream at the first person you talk to. However, your ability to handle your anger might have an impact on how well (or poorly) the organization resolves your problem. Also, the person will probably absorb the information better and be able to resolve the situation more efficiently if he or she doesn't feel under attack. Keep in mind that the person on the other end of the phone is just that—a person. He or she has good days and bad days just like you and looks forward to pleasant calls more than unpleasant ones. If it is the case that your problem was caused by an innocent mistake—a computer error for example—the employee might be much more helpful and make it a higher priority if you are pleasant on the phone.

*Portions of this section have been adapted with permission from:
Freedom Self-advocacy Curriculum: Third Workshop. Teachers' Guide. Philadelphia, PA: National Mental Health Consumers' Self-help Clearinghouse, [N.d.]. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4qfjped
and
Advocacy Tool Kit: Skills and Strategies for Effective Self and Peer Advocacy. (Rev. ed.) Milwaukee, WI: Disability Rights Wisconsin, 2008. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4rd92vu

By managing your anger, you can avoid developing a reputation as a "difficult caller." Most of the organizations that you deal with keep records that phone personnel access when you call them. By avoiding being labeled obnoxious or insulting, you are likely to get better service on future calls.

If you experience a problem that makes you very angry, how can you prevent the anger from boiling over into the phone conversation? The easiest way might be to take some time to cool off. Longtime advocate Mary Ellen Copeland recommends that you do a relaxation exercise before making a stressful phone call. She also has a unique suggestion for managing your anger while you're on the telephone: "Have a friend with you when you make the call, that way you can make faces with your friend but remain calm on the phone."

Before making your call, you can also take time to plan what you are going to say, and gather the information that you might need.

Being assertive on the phone

A big part of assertiveness when using the phone is being persistent enough to get in touch with someone who can help you. When calling large organizations, it's not always easy to reach people. If you have not heard back by the next day, call again and leave another message until you get a return call. If you're having trouble reaching someone, you should leave a message each time, including the dates and times that you are available to speak.

Your assertiveness must continue once you are speaking with a live person. Learning to be assertive without raising your voice or being rude is a skill to be learned, and one that will make you a much more effective advocate.

- Do some research before the call and be prepared with information about your request and your rights.

- Set minimum standards. Often, you will be dealing with low-level employees who do not have the power to compromise; therefore, if anyone compromises, it will have to be you. If a low-level employee cannot meet your minimum demands, ask to speak to his or her supervisor.

- Recognize the other side of the argument. If you demonstrate that you understand the other person's point of view, then he or she cannot dismiss you as being irrational.

- Ask for clarification. Don't let the other person confuse you with jargon or vague statements. Whenever the other person says something that you don't understand, ask for clarification. You can't win a dispute if you don't understand what the other person is saying.

- Leave the door open. State that you would like to reserve the right to submit additional information. If you become flustered on the phone, you can strengthen your case later.

Talking to the right person

As mentioned previously, when you're talking to someone on the phone, it is often someone who won't be able to resolve your situation for you due to lack of authority. Other times, the person on the other end of the line just happens to be a generally unhelpful person.

When you're not getting anywhere by talking to lower-level employees, you might need to "go up the supervisory ladder." You should be aware that going to a supervisor too soon can backfire. Going to a supervisor before you've given someone a fair chance to resolve your problem can create bad feelings, and you can always go to a supervisor later.

If someone fails to resolve a problem to your satisfaction, then you should go up the "supervisory ladder," one level at a time. In other words, always ask to speak with someone's immediate supervisor.

Some advocates recommend going straight to the top of the supervisory ladder, but there is an obvious advantage to moving one level at a time: you give more people the opportunity to give you what you want. If, on the other hand, you go straight to the top, and that person says "no," you probably won't get what you're after.

Keeping records

With any form of self-advocacy, it is important to keep records, but it is especially important to keep accurate and complete records of your telephone conversations. Often, your records will be the best documentation of your attempts to resolve a situation or another party's suggested solutions.

You should keep an accurate record of every person with whom you speak, as well as their titles and what they said. Sometimes, it will strengthen your position if you can demonstrate that the other party was unhelpful, and so you should also document every time that you couldn't get through to someone on the phone, as well as when you left messages for a person.

The Phone Conversation Log on page 26 may be helpful.

Following up

As with any form of advocacy, it is important to follow up when you are advocating by phone. The follow-up usually includes additional phone calls to ensure that agreed-upon actions will be taken. It might also include supplying written documentation or sending follow-up letters, emails or faxes.

Following up on a phone conversation should begin during the conversation itself. For example, if the person with whom you are speaking cannot respond to your request immediately, you should ask when they will get back to you and the date on which you can expect action on what you've requested. If the person promises to take a specific action, then ask when that action will be taken. Be sure to record this information in your notes.

Once you've established dates for responses and/or action, you should make sure that the person sticks to those dates. You can mark a calendar to keep track of the dates. If you haven't heard back or seen results by the agreed-upon date, you should call back.

Be polite but firm. Remind the person that he or she promised to respond or take action by a certain date and ask why this hasn't happened. You should persist until you get what you want, and if you don't see results, then you should proceed up the supervisory ladder one level at a time.

Usually people are handling multiple requests at a time, and one way to ensure that your request gets special attention is to follow a phone call with an email or fax. When speaking with someone, ask for their email or fax number where he or she can be reached. After speaking with a person, send an email or fax summarizing the action requested and the agreed-upon follow-up dates.

If the person does not seem to be responding adequately and you need to move up to the person's immediate supervisor, an email or fax can be effective. Obtain the name of the person's supervisor, and send the email/fax to the person with whom you've spoken and copy (cc) his or her supervisor.

SELF-ESTEEM*

It's common for people with learning and other types of disabilities to have low self-esteem—most people feel bad about themselves from time to time. Feelings of low self-esteem may be triggered by being treated poorly by someone else recently or in the past, or by a person's own judgments of him- or herself. This is normal. However, low self-esteem keeps you from enjoying life, doing the things you want to do, and working toward personal goals. Low self-esteem causes many people to avoid advocating for their needs and rights.

Following are some ideas about things you can do to feel better about yourself and to raise your self-esteem. The ideas are from people who realized they have low self-esteem and worked to improve it.

Self-esteem, depression and other illnesses

Before you begin to consider strategies and activities to help raise your self-esteem, it's important to remember that low self-esteem may be due to depression. To make things even more complicated, the depression may be a symptom of some other illness.

Have you felt sad consistently for several weeks but don't know why you are feeling so sad; i.e., nothing terribly bad has happened, or maybe something bad has happened but you haven't been able to get rid of the feelings of sadness? Is this accompanied by other changes, such as wanting to eat all the time or having no appetite, wanting to sleep all the time or waking up very early and not being able to get back to sleep?

If you answered yes to either question, there are two things you need to do. First, see your doctor for a physical exam to determine the cause of your "depression" and to discuss treatment choices. Next, do some things that will help you to feel better right away, like eating well, getting plenty of exercise and outdoor light, spending time with good friends, and doing things that you enjoy. This could be going to a movie, painting a picture, playing a musical instrument, or reading a good book.

*Parts of this section have been adapted with permission from: Mary Ellen Copeland. *Building Self-esteem: A Self-help Guide*. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA), 2002. Available: http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA-3715/SMA-3715.pdf

Ways to raise your self-esteem

Pay attention to your own needs and wants

Listen to what your body, your mind, and your heart are telling you. For instance, if your body is telling you that you have been sitting down too long, stand up and stretch. If your heart is longing to spend more time with a special friend, do it. If your mind is telling you to clean up your basement, listen to your favorite music, or stop thinking bad thoughts about yourself, take those thoughts seriously.

Take very good care of yourself

When you work at taking good care of yourself, you'll find that you feel better about yourself. Here are some suggestions:

- Eat healthy foods and avoid junk foods. If you like to cook, try new recipes or look for new healthy foods that you might enjoy. Ask friends for their favourite food shopping places and tips for preparing good food while maximizing your budget and time. Look into community kitchens or cooking clubs that will help you learn about new foods and recipes and meet new people.
- Exercise. Moving your body helps you to feel better and improves your self-esteem. Arrange a time every day or as often as possible when you can get some exercise, preferably outdoors. You can do many different things—walk, run, cycle, swim or join a sports, dance or fitness club. If you have a health problem or haven't exercised in a while, be sure to check in with your doctor before changing your exercise habits.
- Set a goal to learn something new every day.

"...As individuals are exposed to new information, gain new insights and experience, and build their own menus of strategies to overcome or work around their areas of struggle, the impact of their learning disabilities can change..."
Sheldon H. Horowitz. *Learning Styles vs. Learning Disabilities*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2007.
Available: http://tinyurl.com/y73mljm

Take time to do things you enjoy
You may be so busy, or feel so badly about yourself, that you spend little or no time doing things you enjoy—things like playing a musical instrument, doing a craft project, going fishing or going for coffee with friends. Make a list of things you enjoy doing. Then do something from that list every day. Add to the list anything new that you discover you enjoy doing.

Do things that make use of your own special talents and abilities
If you are good with your hands for instance, make things for yourself, family, and friends. If you like animals, consider adopting a pet or volunteering at the SPCA or another rescue organization.

Do something nice for another person
Smile at someone who looks sad. Say a few kind words to the check-out cashier at the grocery store. Take a meal to a friend who is sick. Send a card to an acquaintance.

You may be doing some of these things now. There will be others you need to work on. You'll find that you will continue to learn new and better ways to take care of yourself. As you incorporate these changes into your life, your self-esteem will continue to improve.

Ian Paul Marshall. Personal Goal Setting Worksheet
Available: http://tinyurl.com/4ddbruz

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

Self-advocacy takes energy and courage. Being clear about your strengths is important for two reasons. First, recognizing areas where you will need advice or help is key to your success. Second, and perhaps more importantly, understanding your strengths gives you self-confidence and courage to move forward when you encounter set-backs or are bogged down. The positive psychology movement and similar strengths-based approaches have created a variety of questionnaires you can use to assess your strengths. Many charge a fee or require that you purchase a book in order to complete the assessment and receive a detailed analysis of your individual strengths. However, you can benefit from reflecting on your strengths on your own or with a friend or co-worker.

Following is an alphabetical list of strengths collected from a wide variety of personal and career development resources. Work your way through the list and check all strengths that apply to you. You'll probably find that when you review the list, you will immediately recognize some strengths that apply to you and some that don't. We all have strengths that we use less often. You might also see strengths listed that you wish you could claim as your own. Mark those that you don't use often, or those you'd like to have but don't. Come back to these later and work toward them in the future. Follow the instructions below for completing the checklist.

- ❑ Poised
- ❑ Polite
- ❑ Positive
- ❑ Practical
- ❑ Precise
- ❑ Problem-solver
- ❑ Progressive
- ❑ Prudent
- ❑ Punctual
- ❑ Purposeful
- ❑ Quick
- ❑ Quiet
- ❑ Rational
- ❑ Realistic
- ❑ Reasoning
- ❑ Reflective
- ❑ Relaxed
- ❑ Reliable
- ❑ Researcher
- ❑ Reserved
- ❑ Resilient
- ❑ Resourceful
- ❑ Respectful
- ❑ Responsible
- ❑ Retiring
- ❑ Robust
- ❑ Self-aware
- ❑ Self-confident
- ❑ Self-motivated
- ❑ Self-reliant
- ❑ Self-starter
- ❑ Sense of humour
- ❑ Sensible
- ❑ Sensitive
- ❑ Serious
- ❑ Sharp-witted
- ❑ Sincere
- ❑ Sociable
- ❑ Spontaneous
- ❑ Spunky
- ❑ Stable
- ❑ Steady
- ❑ Strong
- ❑ Strong-minded
- ❑ Supportive
- ❑ Systematic
- ❑ Tactful
- ❑ Take initiative
- ❑ Task-oriented
- ❑ Teacher
- ❑ Team player
- ❑ Technologically savvy
- ❑ Tenacious
- ❑ Thorough
- ❑ Thoughtful
- ❑ Tolerant
- ❑ Tough
- ❑ Trusting
- ❑ Trustworthy
- ❑ Truthful
- ❑ Unassuming
- ❑ Understanding
- ❑ Unexcitable
- ❑ Uninhibited
- ❑ Verbal
- ❑ Versatile
- ❑ Visionary
- ❑ Warm
- ❑ Well-organized
- ❑ Wholesome
- ❑ Wise
- ❑ Witty
- ❑ Zany

Personal Strengths Inventory (continued)

List other strengths you have that are not listed above:

Strengths—Resources

Authentic Happiness
Dr. Martin Seligman
Available: http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/

Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)
Michigan Ross School for Business
Available: http://www.bus.umich.edu/Positive/

Clifton StrengthsFinder
Available: http://www.strengthsfinder.com

Gallup—Strengths-Based Development
Available: http://www.gallup.com/consulting/61/strengths-development.aspx

The Happiness Hypothesis
Know Your Strengths, Improve Your Work
Available: www.happinesshypothesis.com/beyond-strengths.html

Marcus Buckingham
Discovery Your Strengths
Available: http://www.tmbc.com/

Positive Psychology Center
Available: http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Resources

Appendix B: Strategies for Controlling Your Anger

Appendix C: Writing Tip Sheet

Appendix D: Oral Communication Tip Sheet

Appendix E: Asking for Help: 13 Tips

Appendix F: Developing Self-advocacy Skills: Adult Educator Tips

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

Advocacy

Advocacy for Hepatitis Care and Support: Basic Advocacy Skills Workshop Leader Handbook. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control. Hepatitis Services, 2004.
Available: http://tinyurl.com/4s4uo8e

Advocacy for Hepatitis Care and Support: Basic Advocacy Skills Workshop Participant's Handbook. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control. Hepatitis Services, 2004.
Available: http://tinyurl.com/4clcb5f

Advocacy Skills. Seattle, WA: Brain Injury Resource Center, 1998.
Available: http://www.headinjury.com/advocacy.htm

Advocacy Tool Kit: Skills and Strategies for Effective Self and Peer Advocacy. Madison, WI: Disability Rights Wisconsin, 2008.
Available: http://tinyurl.com/4rd92vu

BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)
Phone in Victoria: 250-381-7303
Toll-free: 1-888-815-5511 (TTY Accessible)
Available: http://www.bcands.bc.ca/

BC Centre for Elder Advocacy & Support
Vancouver: 604-437-1940
Toll-free: 1-866-437-1940
Available: http://www.bcceas.ca/

BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Main office: 604-875-0188
Advocacy Access Program: 604-872-1278 (Vancouver)
Toll-free for any program: 1-800-663-1278
TTY: 604-875-8835
Available: http://www.bccpd.bc.ca

BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Vancouver, BC
604-687-3063
Available: http://bcpiac.com

Newton Advocacy Group Society
Serves Surrey, Delta, White Rock and Langley
Phone: 604-596-2311
Service can also be accessed by people living in Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission, and Hope toll-free at 1-877-373-2311
Available: http://www.newtonadvocacygroup.ca

PovNet
Available: http://www.povnet.org/
Directory of advocates available in BC: http://www.povnet.org/find-an-advocate/bc

Self Advocacy and Leadership Training (SALT). Edmonton, AB: Canadian Mental Health Association. Edmonton Region, 2011.
Available: http://tinyurl.com/6kh6zwh

Speak Up and Be Heard: Steps to Effective Advocacy. Victoria, BC: Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia, [N.d.].
Available: http://tinyurl.com/4e4v96g

Speaking Up for Hepatitis Care and Support: A Skills Building Workbook. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control. Hepatitis Services, [2010]. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4bzhnep

TRAC Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre
Available: http://www.tenants.bc.ca
Directory of advocacy services across BC
Available: http://tinyurl.com/623loq2

Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA)
Phone: 604-254-7732
Available: http://www.unya.bc.ca/

Using Your Voice: A Guide for Getting Hepatitis C Care and Support [Audio]. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control. Hepatitis Services, [2010]. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4sves43

Using Your Voice: A Guide for Getting Hepatitis C Care and Support [Print]. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control. Hepatitis Services, [2010]. Available: http://tinyurl.com/4bctn2v

Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2002. Available: http://tinyurl.com/5wq2lcz

Vezina, Francine. *Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Advocacy*. Dartmouth, NS: Self-help Connection/Mental Health Consumers In Action Program, 2002. Available: http://tinyurl.com/63cpqwc

General

BC211
Dial "211" for free information and referral to community, social and government services in the Metro Vancouver, Fraser Valley and Squamish-Lillooet Regional Districts
Available: http://www.uwlm.ca/our-impact/facts/bc211

PeerNetBC
Training and support in developing peer support groups.
Phone: 604-733-6186
Available: http://www.peernetbc.com

Human Rights

BC Human Rights Coalition
Vancouver, BC
Phone: 604-689-8474
Toll Free: 1-877-689-8474
Available: http://www.bchrcoalition.org

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Available: http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/1.html

Canadian Human Rights Commission
British Columbia and Yukon Region
Vancouver, BC
Phone: 604-666-2251
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Regional Offices: 1-800-999-6899
Available: http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca

Government

Enquiry BC
Information and contact numbers for provincial government
Victoria: 250-387-6121
Vancouver: 604-660-2421
Elsewhere in BC: 1-800-663-7867
TTY: 604-775-0303 (Vancouver) or toll-free (BC) 1-800-661-8773
BC Government website: http://www.gov.bc.ca/
BC Government Directory: http://dir.gov.bc.ca/

Legal

Access Pro Bono
Vancouver: 604-878-7400
Toll-free: 1-877-762-6664
Available: http://accessprobono.ca/

Clicklaw
Available: http://clicklaw.bc.ca/

Thorstenson, Cliff. *Legal Help for British Columbians: A Guide to Help Non-legal Professionals Make Legal Referrals for Their Clients* (2nd ed.). Merritt, BC: Nicola Valley Advocacy Centre, 2009.
Available: http://tinyurl.com/48cxeom

Appendix B: Strategies for Controlling Your Anger

Everybody gets angry, but out-of-control rage isn't good for those around you, and it plays havoc with your own body. Here are some tips to help you 'simmer down.'

Relaxation

Simple relaxation tools such as deep breathing and relaxing imagery can help calm down angry feelings. If you are involved in a relationship where both partners are hot-tempered, it might be a good idea for both of you to learn these techniques.

Some simple steps you can try:

- Breathe deeply, from your diaphragm. Breathing from your chest won't relax you. Picture your breath coming up from your 'gut.'
- Slowly repeat a calming word or phrase such as 'relax' or 'take it easy.' Repeat it to yourself while breathing deeply.
- Use imagery; visualize a relaxing experience from either your memory or your imagination.
- Non-strenuous, slow exercises such as yoga can relax your muscles and make you feel much calmer.
- Practice these techniques daily. Learn to use them automatically when you're in a tense situation.

Cognitive restructuring

Simply put, this means changing the way you think. Angry people tend to curse, swear, or speak in highly colourful terms that reflect their inner thoughts. When you're angry, your thinking can get very exaggerated and overly dramatic. Try replacing these thoughts with more reasonable ones. For instance, instead of telling yourself, 'Oh, it's awful, it's terrible, everything's ruined,' tell yourself, 'It's frustrating, and it's understandable that I'm upset about it, but it's not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix it anyhow.'

Be careful of words like 'never' or 'always' when talking about yourself or someone else. 'This machine never works,' or 'You're always forgetting things' are not just inaccurate; they also tend to make you feel that your anger is justified and that there's no way to solve the problem. They also alienate and humiliate people who might otherwise be willing to work with you on a solution.

For example, suppose you have a friend who is constantly late when you have made plans to meet. Don't go on the attack; think instead about the goal you want to accomplish—getting you and your friend there at about the same time. Avoid saying things like, 'You're always late! You're the most irresponsible, inconsiderate person I've ever met!' The only goal that this accomplishes is hurting and angering your friend.

Instead, state what the problem is, and try to find a solution that works for both of you; or, take matters into your own hands. For example, you might set your meeting time a half-hour early, so that your friend will, in fact, get there on time, even if you have to trick him or her into doing it! Either way, the problem is solved and the friendship isn't damaged.

Remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything and that it won't make you feel better (and may actually make you feel worse).

Logic defeats anger, because anger, even when it's justified, can quickly become irrational. So use cold hard logic on yourself. Remind yourself that the world is not 'out to get you,' you're just experiencing some of the rough spots of daily life. Do this each time you feel anger getting the best of you, and it'll help you get a more balanced perspective.

Angry people tend to demand things: fairness, appreciation, agreement, willingness to do things their way. Everyone wants these things, and we are all hurt and disappointed when we don't get them; but angry people demand them, and when their demands aren't met, their disappointment becomes anger. As part of their cognitive restructuring, angry people need to become aware of their demanding nature, and translate their expectations into desires. In other words, saying 'I would like' something is healthier than saying 'I demand' or 'I must have' something. When you're unable to get what you want, you will experience the normal reactions of frustration, disappointment, and hurt—but not anger. Some angry people use their anger as a way to avoid feeling hurt, but that doesn't mean the hurt goes away.

Problem-solving

Sometimes our anger and frustration are caused by very real and inescapable problems in our lives. Not all anger is misplaced, and often it's a healthy, natural response to these difficulties. Some people have a cultural belief that every problem has a solution, and it adds to their frustration to find out that this isn't always the case. The best attitude to bring to such a situation is to focus not on finding the solution, but rather on how to handle and face the problem.

Make a plan and check your progress along the way. People who have trouble with planning might find a good guide to organizing and time management helpful. Resolve to give it your best, but also not to punish yourself if an answer doesn't come right away. If you can approach a problem with your best intentions and efforts, and make a serious attempt to face it head-on, you will be less likely to lose patience and fall into all-or-nothing thinking, even if the problem does not get solved right away.

Better communication

Angry people may jump to conclusions. The first thing to do if you are in a heated discussion is to slow down and think your responses through. Don't say the first thing that

comes into your head, but slow down and think carefully about what you want to say. At the same time, listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take your time before answering.

Listen, too, to what underlies the anger. For instance, suppose you like a certain amount of freedom and personal space, and your 'significant other' wants more connection and closeness. If he or she starts complaining about your activities, don't retaliate by painting your partner as a jailer, a warden, or an albatross around your neck.

It's natural to get defensive when you're criticized, but don't fight back; instead, listen to what lies beneath the words. Perhaps the message is that this person feels neglected and unloved. It may take a lot of patient questioning on your part to uncover this, and it may require some breathing space, but don't let your anger—or a partner's—make a discussion spin out of control. Keeping your cool can keep the situation from getting out of control.

Using humour

'Silly humour' can help defuse rage in a number of ways. For one thing, it can help you get a more balanced perspective. When you get angry and call someone a name or refer to them in some imaginative phrase, stop and picture what that word would literally look like. If you're at work and you want to call a co-worker a 'dirt-bag' or a 'single-cell life form,' for example, picture a large bag full of dirt, or an amoeba, sitting at your colleague's desk, talking on the phone, and going to meetings. Do this whenever you want to call another person by a rude name. If you can, draw a picture of what the actual thing might look like. This will take a lot of the edge off your fury—humour can often be relied on to help un-knot a tense situation.

The underlying message of highly angry people is 'Things oughta go my way!' Angry people tend to feel that they are morally correct and that anything blocking or changing their plans is an unbearable indignity that they should NOT have to tolerate. Maybe other people do, but not them.

When you catch yourself feeling that way, picture yourself as a god or goddess, a supreme ruler who owns the streets and stores and office space, striding alone and having your way in all situations, while others defer to you. The more detail you can get into your imaginary scenes, the more chance you'll have to realize that maybe you are being a little unreasonable. You'll also realize how unimportant the things you're angry about really are.

There are two cautions in using humour. First, don't try to just 'laugh off' your problems; rather, use humour to help yourself face them more constructively. Second, don't give in to harsh, sarcastic humour—that's just another form of unhealthy aggression.

What these techniques have in common is a refusal to take yourself too seriously. Anger is a serious emotion, but it's often accompanied by ideas that, if examined, can make you laugh.

Changing your environment

Sometimes it's our immediate surroundings that give us cause for irritation and fury. Problems and responsibilities can weigh on you and make you feel angry about the trap you seem to have fallen into, and with all the people and things that form that trap.

Give yourself a break. Make sure you have some 'personal time' scheduled for times of the day that you know are particularly stressful. For example, a working mother might make a standing rule that when she comes home from work, the first 15 minutes will be quiet time. With this brief respite, she will feel better prepared to handle demands from her kids without blowing up at them.

Some other tips for easing up:

- **Timing.** If you and your spouse tend to fight when you discuss things at night—perhaps you're tired, or distracted, or maybe it's just habit—try changing the times when you talk about important matters so these talks don't turn into arguments.
- **Avoidance.** If you get furious every time you walk by your child's chaotic room, shut the door. Don't make yourself look at what infuriates you. Don't say to yourself, "Well, my child should clean up the room so I won't have to be angry!" That's not the point. The point is to keep yourself calm.
- **Finding alternatives.** If your daily commute through traffic leaves you in a state of rage and frustration, give yourself a project. Perhaps you could find a different route, one that's less congested or more scenic. Or find an alternative way to travel, such as taking a bus or commuter train.

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Thanks to Charles Spielberger, Ph.D., of the University of South Florida in Tampa; and to Jerry Deffenbacher, Ph.D., of Colorado State University in Ft. Collins, Colorado, a psychologist who specializes in anger management.

APPENDIX C: WRITING TIP SHEET

This tool provides practical tips to help you improve your writing skills. Review each of the tips below and practice the ones that are the most relevant to your learning needs.

General Tips

- Determine why you are writing before you start (e.g. to inform, to persuade or to explain).
- Write down a list of ideas (i.e., brainstorm) before you begin to write.
- Keep your writing short and to the point by setting a length or word limit.
- Write neatly so that others can read your writing.
- When writing numbers, spell-out the numbers from zero to nine, and use digits for numbers that are higher than nine (e.g. 15).
- Use words that are simple and easy to understand.
- Avoid using too many punctuation marks (e.g. exclamation points).
- Use a comma to indicate a break, a pause, or to separate ideas within a sentence (e.g.: Workers at the mine site live, work, sleep and eat in close quarters with their co-workers).
- Use a dictionary or spell-checker to verify the correct spelling of words.
- Proofread your writing several times to make sure that there are no grammar or spelling errors.
- Use formatting techniques to draw attention to important information (e.g. bold, underline, and/or italicize text where appropriate).
- Use headings to organize your writing into key sections.
- Avoid using the same word too often. Use a thesaurus to help you identify alternate words that have similar meanings.
- Only introduce one main idea in each paragraph.
- If you use someone else's words or ideas, make sure to reference the original author or source.
- Review your work to make sure that important information is not missing.
- Read your work out loud and listen for anything that sounds awkward or unclear.
- Ask a colleague, friend or family member to proofread your work and to provide feedback.

Reprinted with permission. *Writing Tip Sheet*. [Ottawa, ON]: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, 2009. Available: http://tinyurl.com/6gk4dmf

APPENDIX D: ORAL COMMUNICATION TIP SHEET

This tool provides practical tips to help you improve your oral communication skills. Review each of the tips below and practice the ones that are the most relevant to your learning needs.

General Tips

- Slow down your speech and pronounce words clearly and correctly.
- Vary your pitch, tone and volume to emphasize key words or sentences.
- Record yourself speaking and then listen to the recording to analyze your pitch, tone, speed and volume.
- Adjust the volume of your voice to your audience (e.g. speak softly when you are talking one-on-one; speak louder when you are talking to a larger group or across a room).
- Be conscious of your speech to avoid filler words (e.g. um, uh, ah, like, well, etc.).
- Organize your thoughts and ideas before speaking (e.g. write notes on what you want to say).
- Do not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- Concentrate on the speaker's message and resist distractions in order to focus your attention on listening.
- Respond non-verbally to show understanding and interest when communicating (e.g. nodding your head, smiling, etc.).
- Make eye contact when listening or talking to people.
- Ask questions until you are sure you understand what is being said.
- Be specific when asking questions and giving answers.
- Take notes to help remember what is being communicated.

Reprinted with permission. *Oral Communication Tip Sheet*. [Ottawa, ON]: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, 2009. Available: http://tinyurl.com/62gysnk

APPENDIX E: ASKING FOR HELP: 13 TIPS

Asking for help can be difficult for most of us. Sometimes we're ashamed to let others know about things we can't do or that we're uncertain about our abilities. Asking for help sometimes feels like a sign of weakness or failure. We may also be afraid that our request will be refused or may be an imposition. Researchers have found, however, that people underestimate others' willingness to help.* The following suggestions may be helpful:

1. Don't assume that you should know how or be able to do everything. We all have different experience, skills and strengths.

2. Recognize when you need help. Most of us will occasionally feel awkward, silly or embarrassed about asking for help. Remember: we all need help at times.

3. Don't wait until the last minute to ask for help. Often problems are easier to fix before they have a chance to become more complicated.

4. Time your request well—don't ask for assistance when it's obvious that the person you're asking is busy, preoccupied or not feeling well.

5. Learn as much about the problem as you can—and keep a record of sources of information you've consulted and what you have learned. This will help you to clarify the problem or problems in your mind and to describe what you already know or have tried.

6. Think about how to phrase your request. Be specific about what you need help with and be direct when asking for assistance. Instead of hinting about your need for help, state your request and explain why it's important to you or what their help will enable you to do. Maybe your first call for help is to identify and plan how to ask for help on a specific topic.

7. Make the task as easy as possible for the helper—ensure all materials or details are gathered in advance, provide clear instructions, and if it's a large project, break the work into shifts or activities for different helpers to do.

8. Make a list of people you know who may be able and willing to help and spread the requests around. Don't ask the same one or two people repeatedly for help without tapping other resources.

9. Don't wait until you need help before offering to help others. Become known as a person willing to help out when you can and you'll build a network of people happy to help you too.

10. If asking for information or feedback, don't reject or dismiss what is offered to you. Be gracious.

11. Make it easy for a potential helper to say no to your request. Don't put people on the spot and feel uncomfortable if they're unable to help at this time.

12. Say thank you.

13. Follow-up—let the helper know the outcome.

* Francis J. Flynn and Vanessa K.B. Lake. If You Need Help, Just Ask: Underestimating Compliance with Direct Requests for Help. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 95 (1) 2008;128-143. Available: http://tinyurl.com/yaynrr4

Jodi Glickman. Asking for a Favour: The Three Keys. Havard Business Review blog. January 12, 2011. Available: http://blogs.hbr.org/glickman/2011/01/asking-for-a-favor-the.html

Jodi Glickman. The Biggest Mistake People Make after Receiving a Favour. Harvard Business Review blog. January 19, 2011. Available: http://blogs.hbr.org/glickman/2011/01/the-biggest-mistake-ppl-make-af.html

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Appendix F: Developing Self-advocacy Skills: Adult Educator Tips

The following tips for developing self-advocacy skills among adult learners were offered by conference delegates at "Tools for Inclusion," a conference hosted by the Whole Life Approach to Learning Disabilities Project, March 14-15, 2011. Tips were collected during seven rotating 10 minute "speed dating" presentations facilitated by Shelley Hourston. Participants provided their suggestions for developing the following essential knowledge and skills for self-advocacy among adult learners.

Know your rights

- Provide information about rights
- Use/teach vocabulary relating to rights
- Connect students with resources
- Ask questions about experiences, situations, needs
- Teach/study inclusion throughout history and note changes that have occurred
- Ensure that inclusion is part of the curriculum
- Use a real issue—examples from learners' lives
- Be a mentor or guide/help learners find mentors/guides
- Encourage/support peer guides and sharing
- Ensure access to plain language information about rights, including contact information for reporting/registering complaints or infringements and information about what to do
- Engage learners in conversation and listen for indications of their knowledge regarding rights
- Hold brainstorming sessions on rights and resources
- Ensure access to tutors/supports for reading information about rights
- Provide audio versions of resources/information about rights
- Encourage learners to share their personal experiences—stories
- Bring in a speaker to talk about rights
- Teach research skills to enable learners to connect with community resources

Self-esteem

- Care about your learners
- Ensure opportunities for learners to succeed
- Provide opportunities for sharing success stories
- Notice and acknowledge learners' effort
- Acknowledge learners' knowledge and skills and provide verbal/tangible reward in the moment—affirmation
- Take 50 percent of the responsibility for learners' knowledge
- Recognize learners' strengths and skills and give them the opportunity to use them
- Allow opportunity for learners to teach/share their skills
- Ensure your own self-esteem and boundaries
- Nurture honesty, self-reflection and sharing
- Foster leadership among learners
- Provide opportunity for peer recognition

- Nurture persistence—"Don't give up!"
- Encourage learners to recognize that others have similar experiences and challenges
- Develop learners' abilities and strengths
- Set small/achievable goals and celebrate small and larger successes
- Give choices and support decision-making
- Seek and point out external evidence of achievements
- "Listen to their voices"
- Take time with learners and acknowledge that we all have bad days when we experience challenges to self-esteem
- Develop a habit of focusing on the positive
- Know your own strengths
- Provide opportunities for ownership: create environments/activities/areas of study
- Work on problem areas
- Develop strategies to work in teams to utilize strengths
- Ensure that learners recognize that sometimes things happen beyond our control
- Nurture self-care practices
- Encourage/support learners in rebuilding important relationships
- Discuss multiple intelligences

Communication skills

- Employ modeling/miming strategies to demonstrate communication skills
- Use games such as poker to develop understanding of body language
- Teach self-reflection and self-assessment
- Develop cultural awareness regarding communication styles and experiences
- Use role play to practice scenarios and develop knowledge of body language, anger management, etc.
- Encourage learners to prepare in advance for communication exchanges
- Provide opportunities for practicing communication skills
- Create documents such as checklists and strategies for reference
- Name the skills used in effective communication
- Suggest that learners find an advocate to support them if necessary
- Provide opportunities for group work/sharing and feedback
- Learn and share knowledge of "bureaucratic tricks"—how the system works
- Convey an understanding that as "consumers" they play an important role in the service provider-consumer relationship
- Provide opportunities for real life practice, e.g. writing letters to the editor, writing to local politicians and participating in special advocacy events such as letter writing campaigns

Organizational skills

- Model good organizational skills
- Demonstrate and provide hands-on experience developing a binder or filing system
- Develop capacity to structure time and develop/use time tables etc.
- Develop skills in breaking down information and tasks
- Develop skills in creating/using modified action plans

- Use/encourage use of visible strategies such as checklists, day planners, iPhones, etc.
- Nurture timeliness
- Explore the concept/practice of multi-tasking:
    - some people/cultures may consider multi-tasking rude
    - some people may have difficulty multi-tasking because of their disability
    - when multi-tasking is not possible or successful, learners should understand that bringing a support person is acceptable and advisable
- Teach/practice prioritizing
- Develop strategies for delegating
- Encourage use of simple reminder systems—Post-It notes in obvious places for example
- Teach accessible and effective organizational techniques such as colour coded files or dividers
- Encourage use of a buddy system for checking on processes and work completed
- Provide opportunity to engage in organizational activities for each day

Support: asking for help

- Model requesting/using help from others, for example make it an agenda item, verbalize/think aloud while planning, etc.
- Be receptive to requests for help
- Foster an environment where learners know that it is OK to ask for support
- Create opportunities for planning in advance—create lists of people who could provide help or support (friendly, trustworthy, etc.)
- Provide information about accessible resources for help when needed
- Discuss time element—most support people will require some time to respond or provide the information/action requested
- Ensure that learners know that everyone needs help sometimes
- Role play scenarios in which learners ask for help
- Share personal stories about times you asked for support
- Ask learners as a group about situations where they could benefit from support and brain storm potential resources and the pros and cons of each
- Make help available—be available to help when possible
- Create scripts for learners to use when asking for help
- Ask learners how they feel when they are asked for help
- Explore the positive psychology literature regarding the mental health benefits of volunteering/helping others

Persistence

- Provide encouragement
- Recognize learners' effort and link to their goal
- Be and remain hopeful
- Be patient and nurture patience
- Share success stories as a group
- Use stories and metaphors as examples

- Create an environment where learners understand that it's OK to take time to achieve a goal
- Help learners recognize that they won't always win
- Discuss the difference between persistence and pushiness/assertiveness and aggression
- Nurture strong learner self-esteem
- Employ games in which learners must persevere
- Share stories that include persistence
- Nurture an environment where learners recognize their value and what they have to offer
- Encourage learners to "keep the goal in mind and to visualize it as they would like it to be." "Imagine how you would feel if today you achieved your goal?"